DO EMPLOYEES WORK LIFE POLICIES AND EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES DRIVE EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT? EVIDENCE FROM KENYAN REFERRAL HOSPITAL, SYNERGY EFFECT

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ABSTRACT: *Employees with strong organizational commitment are emotionally attached to the organization and have a strong desire to contribute significantly towards organizational success. The importance of individual commitment to the bottom line of the organization is highly essential for improved performance, higher employee loyalty, increased satisfaction and customer satisfaction. The purpose of this study was to answer the question does employee work life policies and empowerment strategies drive employee commitment? The study employed a case study research design that was conducted at Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital. The target population was three thousand two hundred (3200) respondents targeted because it was the right respondents in the organisation. A sample size of 340 employees was extracted from the target population using stratified sampling for the departments and simple random sampling for the individual respondents. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Software).The cronbach's alpha reliability obtained was 0.623. Multiple regression analyses were used to test the hypotheses. Based on the observed correlation results, work life policies was the strongest predictor of employee commitment (β = 0.300, t=5.670, p< 0.01), followed by employee empowerment (β = 0.154, t=2.820, p<0.01), the findings indicated that there was a significant positive correlation between employee work life policies ,strategy and affective commitment (r=0.317, p<0.01); normative commitment (r=0.329, p<0.01); and continuance commitment (r=0.328, p<0.01) the study also established that there was a significant positive correlation between employee empowerment and affective commitment (r=0.186, p<0.01); normative commitment (r=0.194, p<0.01); and continuance commitment (r=0.188, p<0.01). The study recommends that MTRH lays down proper structures for enhancing employee commitment since as seen from the study employee work life and empowerment drives employee commitment.*

KEYWORDS: Employee Commitment, work life policies, and empowerment

INTRODUCTION

The issue of employee commitment in contemporary organisations has become so dynamic that managers have to appraise and re-appraise their retentions strategies on an on-going basis. In order to succeed in attracting and retaining talented employees, Kenyan Hospitals including MTRH have to consider the needs of their organisations and those of the individuals, as well as the environment in which they operate. According to Schalkwijk (1997), organisations have to develop strategic reward programmes that incorporate pay and employee benefits as well as consideration for the individual employee's personal growth and development. These represent some of the personal needs and career aspirations of employees which must be considered by employers in order to

retain and motivate them to help in achieving organisational goals. One of the challenges faced by the managers of human resources in MTRH today lies in the development and retention of competent employees. The core of the problem remains the strategic imperative to attract and retain talented employees who will make the difference in service delivery and profit maximisation.

The above discussion has provided a background to the problem of employee commitment among public sector hospitals including those in South African, and the challenges posed to employers. Managers are therefore saddled with the responsibility of addressing the problem through the designing and implementation of appropriate retention strategies that are capable of enhancing employee commitment to a manageable proportion. Therefore, the objectives of this study are twofold in addressing this issue as follows:

a)   Examine the extent to which employee work life policies drive employee commitment.
b)   Establish the extent to which employee empowerment drive employee commitment.
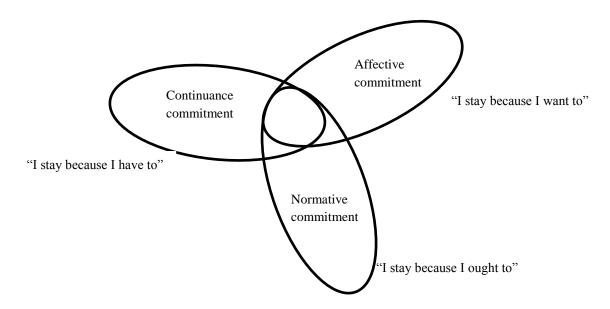
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Concept of Employee Commitment
Employee commitment is a concept that has been the subject of numerous studies (Meyer *et al.*, 2001; Cohen, 1993; Mathieu *et al* 2001). It does not necessarily conform to a universal definition or means of measurement (Meyer *et al.*, 2001). Furthermore, other concepts, similar or connected, may arise to cloud the understanding of organizational commitment. Certain authors therefore warn against reducing commitment to terms such as "motivation" or "attitude" (Brown *et al* 1996), suggesting rather that commitment influences the behavior of individuals' independently of their personal motivation and interests. As a result of this, organizational commitment implies a major professional loyalties as well as a deep identification. Moreover, based on other literature, the concept of organizational commitment should be very reliable as a way of measuring human behavior in organizational groups; more so in any case than other theoretical constructs such as job satisfaction or job involvement. Crewson (1997) furthermore presents a precise, clear definition of organizational commitment, which he analyzes as being an individual identification with an involvement in an organization. Organizational commitment has been generally defined as the degree that an individual in an organization accepts, internalizes, and views his/her role. The process of becoming committed to an organization involves internalizing the values and goals of the organization, a willingness to help the organization achieve its goals, and the desire to remain part of the organization.

Organizational commitment has been operationally stated as "Multidimensional in nature, involving an employee's loyalty to the organization, willingness to extent effort on behalf of the organization, degree of goal and value congruency with the organization and desire to maintain membership". (Mowday, *et al.*, 1979) identified commitment–related attitudes and commitment related behaviors.

Components of Commitment

According to Allen and Meyer (1996), they proposed that three determinants of organisational commitment, is the emotional belongingness to their organization (Affective Commitment), the feeling of obligation to remain with the employer (Normative Commitment) and the cost associated with leaving the organization (Continuance Commitment). Affective commitment refers to the employee's emotional attachment to and involvement in the organization and its goals. It results from the fact that the employee wants retain the relationship with the organization. Continuance commitment is calculative and exchange based in nature and refers to the costs associated with leaving the organization. It makes the individuals to feel that they have to stay in the relationship, because leaving would cost too much like sacrificing pensions, status, and seniority etc., or because they perceive few employment alternatives exist elsewhere. Normative commitment refers to an employee's desire to stay with the organization based on a sense of duty, loyalty, or obligation. This study makes use of the Allen and Meyer's three determinants of organizational commitment measuring i.e., Affective, Continuance, and Normative commitment.

Source: (Meyer and Allen, 1991)

Indicators of Workplace Commitment

Employee involvement can also result from providing employees with the skills necessary for decision making, problem solving, shared leadership and overall understanding of the business. The indicators of workplace commitment are the possible results derived from organizational and individual commitment. Employees with strong organizational commitment are emotionally attached to the organization and have strong desire to contribute significantly towards organizational success. This leads to increased competitiveness, accountability, risk taking, highly innovativeness, low wastage, and the desire to improve overall job performance. Higher degree of organizational commitment is associated with lower rate of turnover and absenteeism, and improved organizational effectiveness (Camp, 1993). Individuals who are more committed are highly motivated and will experience lower level of occupational stress, less emotional exhaustion

and depersonalization. Moreover, increased individual commitment and commitment to work groups or teams improves team performance, interpersonal interaction and group cohesion, and enhances individual performance and degree of satisfaction.

Work Life Policies and Organizational Commitment

Time pressure is a serious problem in today's workforce, with ever increasing number of workers bearing major responsibilities at home and meeting higher job expectations and heavier demands at work (Glass *et al*., 2002). A mismatch between family and work roles can be disadvantageous for both employees and employers. Flexible schedules have been reported as having beneficial effects on job dedication and organizational commitment (Muse *et al.,* 2008). Work life policies have focused on intact nuclear families and largely ignored other household structures even though these are becoming increasingly prevalent (Casper *et al.,* 2007).

Previous studies have reported that this organizational focus leads to feelings of exclusion and unfairness among single employees and employees without children (Grandey, 2009). Work life policies have been reported by Pare *et al.,* 2001) to minimally influence affective commitment and strongly affecting continuance commitment.

In a society filled with conflicting responsibilities, commitment work/life balance has become a predominant issue. Various factors contribute to the interest in work/life balance. They are global competition, renewed interests and global force. When the work load is given beyond the bearable limit, it could affect the family. Naturally, the family members are driven to think that organization are overtaxing them and thus having a direct impact on employees' retention. Organizations/employers need to be more flexible, small gestures like allowing employees/parents to attend to their children's functions would improve loyalty and extended employment.

Employee Empowerment and Organization Commitment

Business organizations in competitive environment are facing major challenges like fast pace of changing technology, acute shortage of skilled manpower and obsolescence of products and services which are compelling for reorienting of existing employees in order to survive and compete. A highly dedicated and committed workforce is essential for achieving organizational goals (Locke *et al.,* 1990). Psychologically empowered employees feel competent and confident to influence their job and work environment in a meaningfully way, they are likely to be proactive and innovative. The constant pressure on management to reduce costs and increase on productivity is possibly only through satisfied and committed work force. Kirkman *et al*., (1999), asserts, the performance outcomes of empowerment practices are high on productivity and proactive and superior answer service, while the attitudinal outcomes comprise of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, team commitment and individual commitment.

A satisfied and committed employee is a valuable asset to the organization. Such an employee is psychologically attached to his job and less likely to leave the organization, (Kuo *et al*., 2009) and thus makes greater contribution for the success of the organization. The basic objective of empowerment is redistribution of power between management and employee most commonly in the form of increasing employee authority, responsibility and influencing commitment (Greasley *et al.,* 2004).

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METHODOLOGY

Survey research design was employed in this study to investigate the extent of the drive and effect of wok life policies and empowerment strategies on employee commitment using probability sampling design .a sample size of 320 employees was obtained from a target population of 3200 employees (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). Structured questionnaires were presented to the selected population in the hospital who were the respondents for the study. Data was done using descriptive statistics specifically mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistics were also used together with multiple regression analysis.

Results

Response Rate

The sample population consisted of Administrators, Section Heads, and the other employees drawn from the Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital. A total of 340 questionnaires were distributed to 10 administrators, 30 section heads and 300 to other employees. As shown in Table 4.1, the overall response rate to the questionnaire was 93.4% (299 respondents). A total of 5 questionnaires were discarded for lack of response and being improperly filled.

Table 4.1:   Distribution of Respondents Response

Sample size	Administrators		Section Heads		Other Employees	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total sample size	10	100	30	100	300	100
Total responses	8	80	27	90	264	88.0
Total unusable	1	10	1	3.3	3	1.07
Total usable response	7	70	26	86.7	261	87.0
Description of unusable questionnaires						
Returned blank	1		0		1	
Incomplete questionnaire	0		1		2	

Source: Survey Data (2014)

The researcher ended up with 294 (86.5%) usable questionnaires. This response rate was deemed acceptable since according to (Fowler, 2002), while there is no agreed-upon minimum response rate, the more the responses received; the more likely it is that statistically significant conclusions about the target population will be drawn.

Work Life Policies and Employee Commitment

Research objective one sought to examine the extent to which employee work life policies drive employee commitment. To obtain these work life policies were measured using four items. Respondents were asked to respond to items related to work life policies. Responses were elicited on a five point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Results presented in Table 4.2 depict that most of the employees don't view their work as influencing their personal

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lives. Respondents tended to agree that their work schedule is not in conflict with their personal life (M=3.52, SD = 1.208); that their job does not affect their roles as spouses or parents (M=3.60, SD=1.267); and that their job does not negatively impact on their personal life (M=4.11, SD = 1.242). Besides, the Skewness and Kurtosis statistics provide evidence of normally distributed responses.

Table 4.2: Descriptive Data on Prevailing Status of Work Life Policies

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness Statistic	Std. Error	Kurtosis Statistic	Std. Error
Employees feel that work is not too much	3.47	1.204	-.579	.143	-.647	.285
Employees work schedule is not in conflict with their personal life	3.52	1.208	-.592	.143	-.687	.285
The job does not affect the employees role as a spouse or parent	3.60	1.267	-.700	.143	-.583	.285
The job does not have a negative impact on employees personal life	4.11	1.242	-1.344	.143	.698	.285

Source: **Survey Data (2014)**

These results imply that respondents are contended with the prevailing work life policy. The nature of their work is such that they do not feel any pressure in terms of their family responsibilities. These findings are essential for employee commitment and lend support to prior findings that point to the importance of organizational culture in predicting organizational commitment. The finding in this study that work/life policies in the hospital correlate positively with employee commitment is consistent with several other findings. On the other hand, (Grover *et al.,* 1995) found out those employees who had access to favorable work life policies showed significantly greater organizational commitment and expressed lower intentions to quit their jobs.

Employee Empowerment and Employee Commitment
The fourth and final objective of this study was to establish the extent to which employee empowerment affects employee commitment. As a result, five items were proposed to measure employee empowerment. Only three of the five items were extracted and used to measure the prevailing status of employee empowerment in the Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital. Respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement with presented items on whether or not the hospital empowers the employees. Once again, responses were elicited on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Results presented in Table 4.3 indicate that participating respondents were satisfied with the prevailing status of employee empowerment in hospital. They tended to agree that they have the opportunity to determine how to do their jobs (M=3.59, SD=1.215); that their work makes good use of employees skills and duties (M-4.43, SD=0.663); and that employees make decisions about new ideas when doing their duties (M=4.08, SD=0.992). Their responses were also found to be normally distributed.

Table 4.3: Descriptive Data on Prevailing Status of Employee Empowerment

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness Statistic	Std. Error	Kurtosis Statistic	Std. Error
Employees have the opportunity to determine how to do their job	3.59	1.215	-.832	.143	-.207	.285
The work makes good use of employees skills and duties	4.43	.663	-1.182	.143	1.930	.285
Employees make decisions about new ideas when doing their duties	4.08	.992	-1.187	.143	1.070	.285

Source: **Survey Data (2014)**

These findings regarding prevailing status of employee empowerment imply that the Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital as an organization values an empowered and committed workforce for effective functioning. This is consistent with prior findings that empowerment is an intrinsic motivation that involves positively valued experiences essential for generating organizational commitment (Singh, 2003). In essence, the employees consider themselves as having freedom, autonomy and discretion, feel personally connected to the organization, and feel confident about own abilities and capability of having an impact on the organization.

Table 4.4: Descriptive Data on Prevailing Level of Employee Commitment

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness Statistic	Std. Error	Kurtosis Statistic	Std. Error
Staying at the organization is a matter of employees' necessity	3.73	1.154	-.890	.143	.069	.285
It is difficult for employees to leave the organization	4.11	.885	-1.365	.143	2.341	.285
Employees have few options to leave the organization	4.01	.879	-1.026	.143	1.226	.285
Employees have an emotional attachment to the organization	4.10	.881	-1.423	.143	2.687	.285
Employees feel guilty if they leave the organization	4.04	.872	-1.061	.143	1.226	.285
Employees own organizations' problems	4.03	.890	-1.029	.143	1.140	.285
Employees have a strong sense of belonging to their organization	3.97	.935	-1.128	.143	1.329	.285
Employees feel an obligation to remain with the organization	4.01	.894	-1.046	.143	1.149	.285
The organization deserves employees' loyalty	3.97	1.313	-1.243	.143	.304	.285
Employees are happy to spend the rest of their career in the organization	3.86	1.327	-.919	.143	-.367	.285

Source: **Survey Data (2014)**

These results imply that most of the Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital's employees depict a high level of commitment. Given that the study also found out that the respondents tended to be happy with the prevailing status of training and development, work life policies, and employee empowerment, the study therefore postulated that employee commitment at the hospital could be modeled as a function of these variables.

Correlation statistics

Correlations between Employee Empowerment and Employee Commitment

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Employee Commitment	1				
2. work life policies	.188**	.990**	.975**	1	
3. Empowerment	.231**	123**	112**	178**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Source: **Survey Data (2014)**

As shown from the Table 4.16, results indicate that there was a significant positive correlation between employee empowerment and training and development (r=0.186, p<0.01); Compensation (r=0.194, p<0.01); work\life policies (r=0.188, p<0.01); Empowerment (r=0.231, p<0.01). This implies that the perceived empowerment of employees by the hospital was likely to impact positively on their commitment to the hospital.

Multiple regression Model
The multiple regression results for predicting employee commitment are presented in Table 4.18, findings showed that 20.7% of the variance in employee commitment was explained by employee compensation, training and development, employee empowerment and work life policies (R^2 squared = 0.24). As expected based on the observed correlation results, work/ life policies was the strongest predictor of employee commitment ($\beta = 0.300$, t=5.670, p< 0.01), followed by employee empowerment ($\beta = 0.154$, t=2.820, p<0.01), employee compensation ($\beta = 0.172$, p<0.01), and training and development ($\beta = 0.134$, p<0.05).

The results show that a 1% increase in work/ life policies was likely to result in a 0.3% in employee commitment, similarly, a 1% increase in employee empowerment was likely to lead to a 0.154% increase in employee commitment, a 1% increase in employee compensation could result in a 0.172% increase in employee commitment, and finally, a 1% improvement in employee training and development could result in a 0.134% increase in employee commitment.

Multiple Regression Results for Employee Commitment Model

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	4.443	0.4		11.107	0		
Work life policies	0.427	0.075	0.301	5.67	0	0.963	1.038
Employee Empowerment	0.263	0.093	0.154	2.82	0.005	0.9	1.111
Multiple R	0.490						
R2	0.240						

a) Predictors :(Constant), Employee Empowerment and Work life policies,
b) Dependent Variable: Employee Commitment
Source: Survey Data (2014)

CONCLUSIONS

The current study sought to investigate the effects of employee retention strategies on employee commitment in the case of MTRH. Consequently, on the basis of the findings highlighted above, the following conclusions were made. Work life policies strategy appears to be effectively used in the hospital. Most employees appear satisfied with the hospital's work life policies. This augers quite well for the hospital since work life policies were found to correlate positively with employee commitment. The hospital also applies the employee empowerment strategy by letting employees be in charge of their work. Given that employee empowerment correlates positively with commitment, the hospital seems to have committed employees.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO ACADEMIC DEBATE

Employee commitment was conceptualized as the dependent variable in the present study. Fourteen items were proposed to measure employee commitment. However, principal components analysis extracted ten items that were used to analyze the Hospital's prevailing levels of employee commitment. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with suggested items regarding employee commitment. Responses were elicited on a 5-point scale with responses ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree. The descriptive data presented in Table 4.4 depict on overall a committed workforce. The mean response to all the items was approximately 4.0 showing agreement with all the items. More particularly, respondents tended to agree to the following. That staying at the hospital is a matter of employee necessity (M=3.73, SD=1.154); that it is difficult for employees to leave the hospital (M=4.11, SD=0.885); that employees have few options to leave the hospital (M=4.01, SD = 0.879); that employees have an emotional attachment to the organization (M= 4.10, SD = 0.881); that employees would feel guilty if they were to leave the hospital (M = 4.04, SD = 0.872); that employees own the hospitals

problems (M=4.03, SD = 0.89); that employees have a strong sense of belonging to the hospital (M= 3.97, SD = 0.935) that employees feel obligated to remain with the hospital (M=4.01, SD = 0.894); that the hospital deserves employees loyalty (M= 3.97, SD = 1.313) and that employees are happy to spend the rest of their careers with the hospital (M = 3.86, SD = 1.327).

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